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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 ANKARA 001336

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JCS PASS J-5/CDR S. WRIGHT

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: OPRC KMDR TU PREL KPAO
SUBJECT: TURKISH MEDIA REACTION
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 2009

In Today's Papers

Heavy Floods Kill 24 in Istanbul, 31 Total in Turkey
All media outlets report 24 people were killed in Wednesday's floods in Istanbul, increasing the death toll over the last two days to 31 with seven others killed in the province of Tekirdag the day before yesterday. More than 10 people are still missing. Seven female factory workers were drowned yesterday morning inside a van carrying them to work. The road to Ataturk Airport, one of the busiest in the world, was heavily flooded. Papers and television channels also report widespread looting from factories and shops. Blackouts and cuts in the natural gas supply are reported in Istanbul after the heavy rains. Istanbul Governor Muammer Guler described the floods in Istanbul as the largest disaster seen in recent years. Transport Minister Binali Yildirim said illegal construction was damaging nature, and added that state officials and citizens were equally responsible for the tragedy in Istanbul. Prime Minister Erdogan announced that his government was going to spend 2 million lira in Istanbul and 250,000 lira in Tekirdag to compensate for the damages.

The Istanbul Chamber of Commerce said the damage caused by floods amounted to USD 90 million, adding textile companies, depots and customs companies in the area suffered the heaviest damage. Business daily Referans says floods that hit the same area in 1995 has caused USD 30 million of damage. Over the 14-year period since 1995, the Istanbul Municipality has neglected to take measures to prevent a new disaster, according to Referans. Mainstream Milliyet calls to account those responsible for the disaster which was triggered by constructions on river beds and water basins in Istanbul. Mainstream Aksam says heavy rain, insufficient infrastructure and improper urbanization led to the calamity. Mainstream Vatan says officials blamed illegal constructions and the changes in natural balances for the disaster. Meteorology officials expect torrential rains in Istanbul to continue Friday and over the weekend.

Editorial Commentary on the Flooding in Istanbul

Gungor Mengi wrote in mainstream Vatan: "What happened was an act of nature but we managed to create a disaster out of it. It was

shameful to listen to what municipality figures as well as the Minister of Environment had to say about this. They either blamed nature for global warming or accused citizens of constructing houses in river beds, as if government officials had nothing to do with any of those constructions."

Atilgan Bayar commented in mainstream Aksam: "Military search and rescue teams did their best to save lives during this terrible flooding. However those scenes indicate something about Turkey's democracy standards as well. If Turkey is still in dire need of military helicopters during natural disasters, this shows the inadequacy of the government's concept of civil defense and housing policies which are directly related to the level of democratic standards."

Mehmet Seker wrote in Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak: "Listening to the remarks from officials as they express their sadness is not good enough. Acts of nature can be prevented for turning into acts of natural disaster. It is an open invitation to disaster if houses are constructed in river beds and if depots are built in next to water canals. It is as simple as this."

Murat Yetkin wrote in liberal-intellectual Radikal: "Water takes its share from the soil, as the common engineering motto goes. Oddly enough, it was again a bunch of engineers working for municipalities who issued licenses and granted permission to people for the construction of houses in river beds and on technically improper and potentially dangerous soil. All of this occurred as a result of administration official's vote-seeking policies."

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PKK Landmine Kills Two Soldiers in Van

Media outlets report two soldiers were killed Wednesday when a PKK-planted landmine went off in Baskale in the province of Van. Security forces continue operations in Hakkari and Siirt provinces following the killing of eight soldiers by the PKK earlier this week. On Thursday, funeral services will be held for the soldiers killed in clashes with the PKK terrorists in Hakkari and Siirt. CNN Turk reports Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc said the government should abstain from giving emotional responses to press reports over the deaths of Turkish soldiers in fighting with the PKK, and that it should not abandon its democratic initiative process.

Baykal Lashes Out at AKP for Heavy Tax Fine on Dogan Group

Media outlets report the main opposition CHP leader Deniz Baykal slammed the ruling AKP government over the USD 2.5 billion of tax fine imposed on Dogan Group. Baykal said the fine did not target a group, but democracy and the rule of law. He noted the judicial system and military have also been under constant pressure. "No tax regulation can explain why an unprecedented fine of billions of dollars was imposed on a corporation that pays a record amount of taxes in Turkey," said Baykal. Baykal also stressed it should be investigated at length who the tax auditors were who imposed the fine and who chose them.

Davutoglu Attends Arab League Summit Talks in Cairo

Papers report Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu told the meeting of the Foreign Ministers Council of the Arab League in Cairo that Turkey wants the Arab League to open a representation office in Ankara as soon as possible. Davutoglu said trade volume between Turkey and the Arab League countries rose to USD 37 billion in 2008.

On Palestine, Davutoglu said concepts like temporary borders, temporary measures and limited sovereignty could not be accepted. He said a Palestinian state should be founded at once within the borders of 1967, and called on the U.S., the EU and Russia to display "constructive policies and determination" regarding this issue. Davutoglu moved on to Jordan on Wednesday after participating in the Arab League ministerial meetings in Cairo.

Papers also report Davutoglu has rejected reports in the Israeli media that he cancelled his trip to Israel when he was denied entrance into Israel from Gaza. Davutoglu has been invited to join a Jerusalem conference to be held by the Israeli President Shimon Peres in October. Mainstream Haberturk says Davutoglu wanted to combine the trip to Jerusalem with a visit to Gaza, but Israel

rejected the plan, over concerns that it could Hamas could abuse it to make a show of force.

GMF Report - "An Obama High" (Radikal)

Media outlets cover the release of the German Marshall Fund's 2009 Transatlantic Trends report, with most outlets noting that Turks agree with Europeans on their support for U.S. President Barack Obama, but disagree with Europeans regarding topics such as Iran and Afghanistan. Islamist-oriented Zaman reports, "Turks Love Barack Obama, But Are Opposed to America's Leadership," as "The latest Marshall Fund survey shows Turks do not trust American policy on topics such as Afghanistan and Iran," and, "Turks think differently than other Europeans about Iran and Afghanistan," because, "29 percent of Turks support a nuclear-armed Iran while 53 percent of Europeans support diplomatic measures to pressure the Iranian administration to give up their nuclear weapons program."

Mainstream Milliyet reports, "A significant portion of the EU does not want Turkey to become a member of the EU, while Turks largely do not believe they will ever become part of the EU." Liberal Radikal headlines, "Despite the EU, Turks Want the EU," and the paper reports, "The percentage of Turks who want Turkey to join the EU has risen six points from last year to 48 percent," while, "Only 4 out of 27 EU members support Turkey's EU membership."

Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet headlines, "Turks Are Cold to NATO," and the paper notes, "only 35 percent of Turks see that it is necessary for Turkey's security to be tied to NATO," while, "69 percent of Turks are pessimistic about the situation in

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Afghanistan."

Editorial on TransAtlantic Trends/ Turkey-Iran

Kadri Gursel wrote in mainstream Milliyet: "Nuclear non-proliferation and Iran's nuclear program will dominate the agenda at the upcoming UNGA. As far as the Turkish MFA is concerned, Tehran's proliferation of nuclear weapons is a matter of serious concern for Ankara, and thus Turkey takes part in international efforts in this regard. At the same though, Turkey's Prime Minister presents a totally different attitude when he said last November that Iran has been forced to defend itself because "those who tell Iran not to produce nuclear weapons all have nuclear weapons." This was a clear statement of support for the Iranian nuclear weapons program which has also affected Turkish public opinion. The TransAtlantic Trends 2009 survey shows that those who accept a nuclear-armed Iran has risen from 16 to 29 percent in Turkey. It seems FM Davutoglu will have to work very hard to deal with this situation since the issue is a litmus test for the ruling AKP government."

Human Rights Group Finds Israel Underestimated Civilian Deaths during Operation Cast Lead

Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet reports in, "252 Children Died in Gaza," that, "Human Rights Group B'Tselem has found that Israel underestimated the numbers of civilian deaths during Operation Cast Lead earlier this year." Islamist-oriented Zaman headlines, "Israel Is Censoring Civilian Death Tallies in Gaza," and the article says, "It has come to light that there were more civilian deaths during Israel's 22-day attacks in Gaza than previously stated," as, "figures now indicate that 1400 civilians died, including 252 children under the age of 16." Mainstream Sabah reports, "The majority of the deaths in Gaza were civilians."

Iraqi Shoe-Hurler to Be Released from Prison

Mainstream Milliyet reports in, "The Shoe Brings Good Luck," that, "the Iraqi journalist hailed throughout the Arab world as a hero for throwing his shoe at former U.S. President George Bush is expected to be released from prison next Monday." Mainstream Sabah headlines, "He Threw A Shoe at Bush, And He Returns," as, "Support for El Zaydi has come in the form of a new four-bedroom home which was constructed for him," along with, "countless women from Morocco and Palestine who called into a television show that offered to look for a wife for El Zaydi," and one person in Saudi Arabia has "offered him \$10 million for the other shoe he was wearing" when he threw his shoe at Bush on December 14, 2008.

TV News (CNN Turk) Domestic

- CHP leader Deniz Baykal said it wouldn't be appropriate to turn down Prime Minister Erdogan's request for a meeting with the CHP, but adds that his party would never become part of the government's Kurdish 'democratic initiative.'

- The Financial Times says Turkey deserves more EU support, but that there was little political incentive in backing EU membership in Ankara.

- Observers expect the Turkish economy to report 8 percent of shrinking in the second quarter of the year.

World

- Turkish and Greek Cypriot leaders Talat and Christofias will meet today for the second round of Cyprus peace talks.

- Prime Minister Erdogan will travel to the U.S. toward the end of this month to join UN General Assembly meetings in New York and the G-20 summit in Pittsburgh.

- A car bomb kills at least eight people from the same family in

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Kirkuk in northern Iraq.

- Iran's chief of Joint Armed Forces said President Obama was more of a "realist" than his predecessor, George W. Bush, in handling Tehran's nuclear case.

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